

Self-Esteem in At-Risk Students

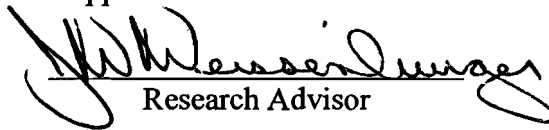
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ABSTRACT

Defining at-risk children is a challenging quest. However, once identified, these individuals can be examined further; and, in some instances, more positive interventions can be implemented to help foster successful outcomes, including positive self-esteem. Many factors can contribute to one possessing a low self-esteem. Negative conditions are factors that put a child at-risk. The more risk factors, the more likely individuals are to have low self-esteem. Risk factors and self-esteem affect each other. Risk factors increase the likelihood that an individual will possess a low self-esteem, and individuals who evaluate themselves negatively tend to have factors in their lives that put them at-risk.

This research project examined the self-esteem of fourth and fifth grade students from three different schools in north central Wisconsin. Results compared fourth and fifth graders, males and females, and low socioeconomic

status versus those not identified with low socioeconomic status. Findings revealed no significant differences in the overall levels of self-esteem between grade levels or between genders. However, some differences were noted for various items on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale. There was a significant difference in overall self-esteem between students who received subsidized lunch and those who participated in the regular lunch program.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

Self-esteem affects every aspect of people's lives. Studies have found that environmental or social factors are the greatest influences on self-esteem (Rak, 1996; "Study," 2000 & Tucker, 2002). With family creating the biggest impact (Kernis, Brown & Brody, 2000; Rak, 1996; Shelton, 1990 & Woods, 1995), studies have examined what aspects of the family life help create a high self-esteem and what factors contribute to diminishing self-esteem of children. With this in mind, the question arises as to whether economically disadvantaged children are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem because they are also more likely to have environmental disadvantages.

Self-esteem impacts an individual's thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Axinn, Duncan and Thornton (1999) stated:

Self-esteem is generally conceptualized as the central evaluative component of the self and reflects the extent to which individuals believe they are worthwhile and merit respect. Consequently, children who have internalized self-respect, a sense of personal worth and positive evaluations of themselves have higher levels of well-being than those who view themselves as inadequate, unworthy, or seriously deficient as people. (p. 520)

Although self-esteem affects our lives, many aspects of people's lives also have been known to affect self-esteem. According to Ford and Ford, "Self-esteem appears to be significantly influenced by the actual or anticipated social evaluative feedback provided by others. This has led some to propose that one's self-concept is largely a social product" (as cited in Herr, 1999, p. 316). Axinn, Duncan and Thornton (1999) stated that social institutions in which individuals "are embedded creates and molds self-



esteem” (p. 521). These institutions include friends, family, school and church. Axinn, Duncan and Thornton (1999) asserted that the family affects and impacts self-esteem the greatest of all institutions. A myriad of familial factors can contribute to, or hinder, a child’s self-esteem. These include: (a) discipline techniques, (b) stress, (c) parental attention, (d) domestic violence, (e) divorce, (f) single parenting, and (g) socioeconomic status.

*Discipline.* Children need discipline and rules, most significantly within the home (Ogden & Germinario, 1988 & Webb, 1992). Family rules or system rules provide consistency and allow problems to be solved efficiently, thus allow living patterns to be easily adjusted. With rules and effective discipline, children learn responsibility and boundaries (Webb, 1992).

*Stress.* Family size, violence and abuse, discipline and rules, marital status, education, and socioeconomic status are some factors that can cause stress in a family, which in turn, can affect children, especially their self-esteem (Rak, 1996, Smokowski, 1998; Webb, 1992). When parents are under a great deal of stress, their parenting roles are affected. According to Axinn, Duncan and Thornton (1999), stressed parents often do not give enough attention to their children; therefore, these children are not in a situation in which they are likely to feel good about themselves.

*Parental Attention.* In relation to the concept of attention, having a great number of siblings can affect the amount of individual attention children receive in the home. The more brothers and sisters one has, the more they need to compete with each other for the parents’ attention. Those children in large families who do not feel like they are receiving

the appropriate or equal amount of parental time as their siblings are often less likely to engage in positive self-thinking (Menaghan & Parcel, 1991).

*Violence.* Violence and abuse harms the child mentally as much as it does physically (Massey, 1998; Menaghan & Parcel, 1991). In homes in which children witness or are victims of abuse, they are more likely to view the world very negatively. The most common outcome in situations of violence and abuse is that the individual perceives the world around him or her as sad, threatening, and not affirmative. Domestic violence can also influence how children perceive themselves (Massey, 1998).

*Divorce and Single Parenting.* Webb (1992) stated, “More than 1 million children come from homes in which their parents are divorced, and one out of five children lives in a single-parent home” (p. 1). More currently, the U.S. Census Bureau’s Population Survey from 2006 reported that 20,619 out of 73,664 (27.9%) children under the age of 18 only live with one parent. Of those 20,619 children, 7,264 (35%) come from homes in which their parents have divorced, and 2,867 (13%) come from homes in which their parent(s) are separated. These numbers show just how many children are affected by divorce and single-parent households, and the numbers are rising. The increasing numbers of divorced and single parents mean many children may not be getting the love, care, and supervision needed to feel good about themselves (Webb, 1992 & Youssef, 1998).

*Socioeconomic Status.* Lower incomes tend to correlate with single-parent households. In a single-parent household, the source of income is generally half that of a two-parent household (Webb, 1992). Studies have found that family income can alter one’s self-esteem (Axinn, Duncan & Thornton, 1999; Twenge & Campbell, 2002).

Children in families that are struggling economically may be less likely to obtain physical materials needed to “satisfy individual aspirations” (Axinn, Duncan & Thornton, 1999, p. 521).

Living with low socioeconomic status can also create parental and marital stress. Couples who struggle to financially support themselves and their families often engage in arguments about money, and they are less likely to be supportive and involved as parents (Axinn, Duncan & Thornton, 1999). Moreover, education can have a decided impact on socioeconomic status. Lower education levels have been shown to correlate with a lower income (Smokowski, 1998).

Many children are labeled at-risk because they come from single-parent families and/or struggle financially. Since at-risk children fit many of the characteristics mentioned above, they may be particularly vulnerable to experiencing low self-esteem.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

Although much has been written about the potential correspondence between environmental factors and children’s self-esteem, few quantitative studies have been conducted in this area. As such, this study will examine if students’ self-esteem is affected by socioeconomic status, grade level, and gender.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

Research suggests that the self-esteem of students affects many aspects related to education. The results of this study are important because the results will have implications for effective practice. That is, teachers and parents will gain knowledge as to how self-esteem can be affected by such variables as the gender and the socioeconomic status of their students. Through increased awareness about the effects of such variables,

recommendations can be made to improve self-esteem according to the different needs of students. The school district and staff, parents, and students themselves could learn ways to improve self-esteem.

### *Research Questions*

There are three research questions this research will attempt to answer. They are as follows:

1. Does the self-esteem of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, as measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, differ by gender?
2. Does the self-esteem of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, as measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, differ by grade?
3. Does the self-esteem of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, as measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, differ by socioeconomic status?

### *Definition of Terms*

To clarify, the following terms are defined:

*At-Risk.* Children who are more likely to satisfy their developmental needs in dysfunctional ways because of specific internal or external factors (Ogden & Germinario, 1988). For the purpose of this study, at-risk refers to students from low socioeconomic backgrounds; specifically those who currently receive subsidized lunches at their school.

*Elementary Age.* For the purpose of this study, ‘elementary age’ refers to students in grades four and five.

*High Self-Esteem.* Appreciating oneself and acknowledging self-worth, self control and competence, with a corresponding positive attitude and high self-evaluation (Walz, 1991).

*Low Self-Esteem.* Low self-evaluations, self-criticism and feelings of hopelessness (Brendgen, 2002).

*Low Socioeconomic Status.* A household with an income below the poverty line (Department of Public Instruction, 1995). For the purpose of this study, low socioeconomic status refers to those students who receive free or subsidized lunches at school.

*Resilience.* Resilience is defined by Werner and Smith in *Strengthening Resilience in Children and Youths: Maximizing Opportunities through the School* (2006) as, “achieving positive outcomes despite risk.” Rak and Patterson (1996) identify resiliency in children as “The capacity of those who are exposed to identifiable risk factors to overcome those risks and avoid negative outcomes such as delinquency and behavior problems, psychological maladjustment, academic difficulties, and physical complications. In effect, they continue to progress in their positive development despite being ‘bent, compressed, or stretched’ by factors in a risky environment.”

*Self-Concept.* Cohen (2003) defined self-concept as, “Our enduring sense of self that is shaped primarily by our early experience and interactions with parents and other people and changes only slowly over time” (p. 1).

*Self-Confidence.* Hagbaghery, Salsali, and Ahmadi (2004) defined self-confidence as how one believes in his or her capabilities.

*Self-Esteem.* Herr (1999) defined self-esteem as, “A judgmental process in which individuals examine their performance, capacities, and attributes according to their own personal standards and values and reach decisions about their personal worth” (p. 315).

According to Pawel (2001), self-esteem also refers to our feelings of “worth as human beings, sense of purpose in life, and how lovable we think we are” (p. 1).

*Self-Worth.* As cited in The Self-Worth, Physical and Social Activities of Graduate Students: A Qualitative Study (2006), self-worth is defined as “the feeling people have about themselves; the extent to which they perceive themselves to be a success or a failure in the world” (p. 3).

## Chapter II: Literature Review

A single definition solely designated to describe children at-risk does not exist. Therefore, this chapter will present different definitions, followed by the classification or identification of children labeled at-risk. In addition, risk factors that can lead to a child being designated as at-risk will be explored. This chapter will also review the resilient qualities many children labeled at-risk possess. Furthermore, this chapter will review self-esteem and those factors that may increase the likelihood of a higher self-esteem in children at-risk. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a discussion of motivation in relation to children at-risk.

### *Defining and Identifying Children At-Risk*

Defining children as at-risk is challenging since the definition is not black and white and is ever-changing (Donnelly, 1987). As reported in “Causal Relationships Between Poverty and Disability” (2007), children of families identified as having low socioeconomic status are more likely to suffer from physical illnesses. Lustig and Strauser (2007) continued to report that low socioeconomic status is related to health problems, emotional issues, being overweight, and having other issues. Children labeled at-risk are thought to be more susceptible to physical complications, such as vision or hearing difficulties. Furthermore, children at-risk may be or become overweight and possess treatable or incurable diseases or illnesses. Many times these children demonstrate academic difficulties; and, all too commonly, these individuals drop out of school before reaching twelfth grade (Lustig & Strauser, 2007; Youssef, 1998). Behaviorally, children at-risk may be considered delinquents and experience psychological problems (Rak & Patterson, 1996).

There are a few variations in the way Herr (1999) defined at-risk. According to Herr, at-risk individuals are those who are at risk of becoming physically or mentally ill, being abused, engaging in unacceptable or inappropriate behaviors, and/or suffering from a low socioeconomic status.

Children are thought to be at-risk of engaging in inappropriate behaviors or “turning to dysfunctional means to satisfy their developmental needs” (Ogden & Germinario, 1988, p. 50) because they often have a low self-esteem and are unsatisfied with themselves as a result of a social, school, or family conditions (Ogden & Germinario, 1988). Dropping out of school, getting involved with alcohol and drugs, getting involved with other individuals who use and abuse alcohol and other drugs, and sexual intercourse are a few examples of outcomes associated with children at-risk. Further, girls who are identified at-risk are more susceptible to becoming pregnant in their teen years (Woods, 2004).

*School-based definitions.* The state of Wisconsin addresses some of the characteristics mentioned above in their definition:

Pupils in grades 5 to 12 who are at-risk of not graduating from high school because they are dropouts or have 2 or more of the following characteristics:

- 1m. One or more years behind their age group in the number of high school credits attained.
2. Two or more years behind their age group in basic skill levels.
- 2m. Habitual truants
3. Parents.
4. Adjudicated delinquents.



5. Eighth grade pupils whose score in each subject area on the examination administered under s. 118.30 (1m) (am) 1. was below the basic level, 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils who failed the examination administered under s. 118.30 (1m) (am) 2., and 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils who failed to be promoted to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. (Wisconsin State Legislature, 2007, p. 11).

In the definition of at-risk provided by the Wisconsin State Legislature, students are identified by their poor academic performance, including failing, lagging behind peers, and dropping out of school (2007).

There are many other ways children are identified and labeled at-risk, and doing poorly academically is only one characteristic. Along with background knowledge and history records both of family and school, other factors make it more likely to identify students at-risk. According to Gottfredson (1986), schools with high numbers of low socioeconomic often have more behavioral concerns than those schools not identified as a low-income school. As cited in “Promising Strategies for Improving Student Behavior,” students from low-income schools often reported negatively when asked about their attitudes toward school (Gottfredson, 1986). They tend to dislike going and being at school, as well as participating in school activities. They also often report feeling as though they do not belong (Gottfredson).

*Acting out behaviors.* As cited in “Empowering At-Risk Children” (Webb, 1992), children at-risk sometimes exhibit poor interaction skills or social skills compared to their same aged peers. Further, the friends they tend to group with often engage in illegal activities such as using drugs (Ogden & Germinario, 1988). According to Ogden and

Germinario children at-risk find themselves using and abusing drugs as well in many instances.

Children can also be identified as at-risk when they exhibit noncompliance toward authority figures such as parents, teachers, and police officers (Ogden & Germinario, 1988). According to these authors, all too often children at-risk do not abide by the rules and rebel.

*Internalizing characteristics.* Usually, children can be identified or noticed immediately when they engage in inappropriate or illegal activities, but unfortunately other characteristics of these children are not as noticeable. Webb (1992) suggested many children at-risk have a low self-esteem, mood disorders, and/or identity confusion. As suggested in “Empowering At-Risk Children” (Webb, 1992, p.1), “Eighty percent of all children come from dysfunctional families in which they do not receive the necessary love, guidance, and nurturing to form healthy relationships and feel good about themselves and what they do.” It is more difficult to identify those students who may suffer from a low self-esteem or mood disorders, but these symptoms or characteristics are far from unimportant. As Webb stated, these students need to be identified and their problems need to be addressed (Webb).

Some children identified at-risk retain internalizing characteristics which are more difficult to identify. Other children display external actions by physically acting in a particular way that is more noticeable. Regardless, children at-risk often suffer academically, socially, physically, and emotionally (Ogden & Germinario, 1988). It may be impossible to change the circumstances leading to the identification of children at-risk,

but early identification, helpful and corrective interventions are most beneficial (Ogden & Germinario, 1988).

### *Risk Factors*

Risk factors are defined by Smokowski (1998) as, “Any influences that increase the probability of onset, digression to a more serious state, or maintenance of a problem condition” (p. 2). Children at-risk may be more likely to be involved in negative outcomes, such as those mentioned earlier. The reasons for negative outcomes are many.

A survey was conducted in the state of Washington to assess the emotional status of children aged 6 through 17 (Study, 2000). The survey also looked specifically into emotional status of children raised by one parent and of children from disadvantaged homes. The results found children from low income families or single-parent homes were two times more likely to have emotional and behavior tribulations than other children their age (Study).

Emotional and behavioral issues often co-occur. Poverty is often linked to parental factors such as lower levels of education, unemployment, high levels of stress, and single-parent homes, and these environmental factors can create risk factors for children (Smokowski, 1998). Pallas (1989) suggested that many school-aged children were culturally deprived; and, therefore, were at a disadvantage in school and with life in general.

Numerous factors are thought to lead to, or co-occur, with children identified or labeled at-risk. Common indicators of an individual’s susceptibility of being labeled can be divided into four main categories: school, family, community, and individual qualities (Youssef, 1998).

*School factors.* Within school, poor school performance in the early grades can set the stage for significant difficulties later in life. Retention, failing or falling behind their peers, and sudden declines in homework and grades are common risk factors. Woods (2004) suggested that children who are retained one or more years are more likely to drop out before completing twelfth grade. Also, when children are not told about the importance of school and are not expected to succeed, the result is little commitment to school and schoolwork. Therefore, these children are more at risk for truancy, acting out, and dropping out later in life (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Herr, 1999; Pallas, 1989).

*Family factors.* Family history, composition, and style all impact children and the likelihood of becoming at-risk (Emler, 2001; Woods, 2004). Limited support offered and maintained by family members can be a precursor to children becoming at-risk. If parents, siblings, and other family members are not supportive of each other, younger children and adolescents are more likely to become at-risk and resort to dysfunctional ways of getting their needs met (Donnelly, 2000). Other family risk factors include low socioeconomic status, level of education attained by both parents and siblings, including school drop outs, single parent homes, and family life styles that are chaotic, draining, anxiety provoking, and unstable (Woods, 2004).

Family composition, such as single-parent homes and family size, can have an impact on both income and attention. Single parent homes and family size can become risk factors if a child's attention, safety, and nutritional needs are not met (Rak & Patterson, 1996; Smokowski, 1998; Webb, 1992).

Parental education can also affect family incomes and values (Pallas, 1989). When parents do not stress the importance of school success based on their own

experiences and opportunities, their views tend to be passed onto their children. Parental attitudes can create barriers to achieve and do well in school (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Donnelly, 2000; Herr, 1999; Pallas, 1989).

Some parenting styles can also present potential risk factors for children. Lack of supervision, abuse, and neglect are suggested to be major contributors to creating children at-risk (Massey, 1998). Children are more likely to be labeled at-risk if they have never attached or bonded with a parent (Massey, 1998). Attachment and bonding to another individual, such as a parent, are key components to high self-esteem, self-discipline, and responsibility according to Massey. According to Bancroft, Wilson, Cunningham-Burley, Backett-Milburn, and Masters (2004), parental substance use also affects parenting and how children view the world around them. Living in a home in which they are exposed to substance use is also a big risk factor (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Herr, 1999; Pallas, 1989; Wilson, Cunningham-Burley, Backett-Milburn, & Masters, 2004).

Another potential risk factor for children is family mobility. When families move frequently, the child experiences inconsistent home and educational settings (Woods, 2004). According to Oesterreich (2004), the ratio of families that move every year in America is one of five. Moving to a new home, no matter if it be a new state, city, or neighborhood, is very stressful for all family members. Depending on the child's social skills and attitude, it may be difficult to make new friends. Making and having friends is an important factor in children's lives (Oesterreich). Further, moving frequently can affect the children's school performance (Steele & Sheppard, 2003). Moving creates inconsistency in a child's life. Along with inconsistency comes confusion, frustration,

anger, and many more emotions. A study done by Alexander (1996), for example, found that children of both low and high socioeconomic status are adversely affected by transferring schools. Another study conducted by Nelson (1996) found that children who move more than one time were more likely to exhibit behavioral issues and were absent more often from school than those students who only moved once or have not moved at all. These emotions can affect the child and can make the child more at-risk for developing low self-esteem, dropping out of school, and engaging in unhealthy behaviors (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Oesterreich, 2004; Steele & Sheppard, 2003).

*Ethnicity and race.* Ethnicity and race are physical and social characteristics of families. Pallas (1989) stated, "Black and Hispanic students frequently score lower on tests than do Whites, and are more likely to drop out of school than are Whites" (p. 3). According to Leon (1996), many migrants living in the United States are of Hispanic background. Children of these migrant workers tend to fall behind academically because of frequent family mobility, the need to miss school for work, and having limited English speaking skills. Leon also found that children of migrant workers often have lower self-esteem than most of their same aged peers.

In addition to race and ethnicity, children's primary language can impact their risk factors. Those with limited English speaking proficiency or non-English speaking generally struggle in our nation's schools compared to more their primary English speaking peers, which puts them at-risk (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Herr, 1999; Pallas, 1989). Vanderhaar and Munoz (2005) found that students with limited English language proficiency struggled in school more than their peers especially when other risk factors, such as low socioeconomic status, one-parent homes, and other factors were involved.

Vanderhaar and Munoz also found that one reason students struggle more academically is because of the limited English they are exposed to out of the school setting. Some research suggests students regress in their academic skills in the summer months when they are not in formal academic settings (Vanderhaar and Munoz, 2005). Vanderhaar and Munoz found that English language learning students' academic skills regressed even more over the summer months because they were not exposed to the type of English they were exposed to in school.

*Community factors.* One of the most predominant risk factors is poverty (Pallas, 1989). Poverty can be classified as a source of both family and individual problems, but it can also be a community issue. Children from low income families often have a more difficult time getting their needs met (Pallas, 1989; Woods, 2004).

According to The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2006), children who live in poverty when they are younger struggle later in life because they have not learned what and how to meet their needs appropriately. Children living in poverty often are also unable to get the adequate medical services that children receive when they do not live in poverty (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2006). Parents of these children often find their work does not provide health insurance and requires them to work long or untraditional hours; therefore, children are less likely to get their physical and emotional needs met.

*Individual factors.* Donnelly (1987) suggested, "The roots of at-risk behavior begin in the elementary grades with low achievement patterns, high absenteeism, and low self-esteem" (p. 2). Although some researchers believe the roots of at-risk behavior begin at the elementary level (Frost & McKelvie, 2004), some at-risk qualities begin at birth (South Hampton City Council, 2004). Some of these early characteristics include

emotional and behavioral disorders, little tolerance for frustration, and insufficient interaction and social skills. Some characteristics are thought to originate biologically, such as low birth weight (often due to poverty and malnutrition) (Webb, 1992). Other characteristics include substance abuse, teen pregnancy, problems with the law, truancy, absenteeism, dilatory, suspension (Woods, 2004), along with giving in to peer pressures, and poor social skills (Herr, 1999). Woods (2004) suggested a correlation between students who drop out of school and the incidence of risky behaviors such as, “premature sexual activity, early pregnancy, delinquency, crime, violence, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide” (p. 2). Individuals raised by deviant parents, those children with aggressive behavior disorders and those terribly deprived socially, culturally, economically, and nutritionally are disadvantaged in many ways, therefore increasing the chances of being at-risk (Herr, 1999).

### *Self-Esteem*

Cohen (2003) defined self-esteem as, “how we feel about ourselves on a day to day basis” (p. 1). In addition, Pawel (2001) included it as our perception of our “inside qualities, our worth as human beings, sense of purpose in life, and how lovable we think we are” (p. 1). Individuals with low self-esteem often suffer common emotions including sadness, distress and worry, guilt, disgrace, embarrassment, frustration and ire (Brendgen, 2002). According to Emler (2001), individuals with low self-esteem are also more at-risk for “suicide, suicide attempts, and depression, for teenage pregnancy and for victimization by others” (p. 1). Evidence also suggests childhood self-esteem is later correlated with eating disorders in adolescence, how much they make in their jobs/careers and how long they can hold jobs (Emler).



There are a variety of factors that can contribute to one's self-esteem. Effects of parenting, exposure to violence, ethnic background, community factors, and gender differences all have been known to affect self-esteem.

*Single parent households.* In a Study of Income and Program Participation completed by the U.S. Census Bureau (1999), it was determined that one-parent households often make less money than two-parent households; therefore, single parents may be more likely to request government assistance to help support their children. Benson (2003) reported children raised by their mother alone are almost three times more likely to suffer from low socioeconomic status than those children living in a two-parent home. According to Webb (1992), children living in households with only one parent are more likely to suffer from a low self-esteem because of the lack of attention, stress and income due to only one parent supporting as the head of the household. Ballard (1995) reported that the amount of single parent households is up and on the rise: "From 1960 to 1988 the percentage of children living in households with only one adult tripled" (p. 4). In 1992, Webb reported one million children come from homes where parents are separated or divorced; the result is that one of five children are living in single parent households. In 2006, the U.S. Census Bureau found about 28 percent of children under the age of 18 lived with only one parent, and about 13 percent of those children's parents are divorced or separated.

According to Ballard (1995), when families break apart, more specifically, when fathers leave the home and are not a part of their children's lives, children are more likely to experience low self-esteem. Fathers are thought to give and model social skills, arouse inquisitiveness, regulate control and discipline, and create a feeling of safety through

being a protector. As such, so many needed factors are missing without the presence of a father. According to Ballard, girls raised without a father often suffer from low self-esteem and are more at-risk to become pregnant themselves in their teenage years because of this effect.

*Parenting.* Mothers and fathers' parenting styles can contribute to their children's self-esteem. When parents neither give their children approval nor do they accept them, the children's self-esteem is likely to decline (Emler, 2001). Parents who do not compliment and praise the good things, but rather emphasize their children's wrong choices are more likely to damage the self-esteem of their children (Kernis, Brown, Brody, 2000).

According to Kernis, Brown, and Brody (2000), fathers who are very derogatory and use offensive words and tones that are verbally abusive often damage their children's self-esteem. When children hear all this negativity about themselves, they begin to believe it. As a result, their self-esteem and self-worth diminishes over time. As was stated by Kernis and colleagues, another damaging style of fathers is to use "guilt arousal and love withdrawal" (p. 245) to control their children and their behaviors.

Research shows mothers' parenting styles can affect the self-esteem of their children, but in a different way (Kernis, Brown, & Brody, 2000). According to Kernis and colleagues, the more inconsistent a mother's discipline, the more confusing for the children. Confusion can lead to self-esteem problems. Children receive mixed messages from inconsistency, especially from inconsistent discipline. According to Kernis, Brown, and Brody, one message children receive through inconsistency is that the mother does not care and are not willing to give their children the attention they need.

The parenting skills of mothers are affected when they work outside of the home. The circumstances and conditions from work carry home with her, thus affecting how a mother parents her children. Menaghan and Parcel (1991) stated, "Working conditions have intergenerational repercussions on maternal parenting and their capacity to provide appropriate and responsive nurturing to children" (p. 2).

Stress from work is one of the main factors that can impact maternal parenting. According to Menaghan and Parcel, when mothers are employed in desired jobs, their parenting tends to be more positive even if they are experiencing stress in the workplace. If mothers are enjoying their job, they can cope with the stress associated with the workplace. Stress from a positive work environment can lead to feelings of independence and self-direction, which makes it easier for mothers to cope. When mothers enjoy their jobs, they tend to provide more "cognitively enriching, affective and physically appropriate home environments" (Menaghan & Parcel, p. 2). According to Menaghan and Parcel, this type of environment is more rewarding for children and they are more likely to feel good about being at home and about themselves. On the other hand, when mothers are employed in unfulfilling jobs, their personal self-esteem is lowered and it affects their parenting style; which, in turn, can affect their children's self-esteem and how they feel about themselves. According to Menaghan and Parcel, when mothers are working in an unfavorable job, especially if the wages are low, they do not get as much satisfaction out of their job and are less likely to feel good about themselves. These mothers often have a difficult time dealing with the stress of unsatisfying jobs; therefore, they are stressed when they come home.

As an example, York (1994) found children of working mothers reported more feelings of stress than those whose mothers did not work. When mothers are stressed from work, especially when they need to work additional hours to make enough money to support the family, the allotted time and energy for their children deteriorates. When parents do not spend sufficient amount of quality time with their children, the children experience the effects as well. Children exhibit a lower self-esteem when they spend little time with parents because of the neglected feelings they experience (Menaghan & Parcel, 1991).

When parents work abundant hours, children can feel neglected. However, large families also can produce the same feelings in children. Menaghan and Parcel (1991) reported that children are more likely to be neglected or receive less personal attention when parents need to divide their attention among a number of children. Again, when children feel neglected, they do not feel good about themselves and their self-esteem can suffer. A negative parenting characteristic is violence or hostility. When parents are stressed out and have fewer support systems, they are more likely to engage in more hostile and violent parenting (Menaghan and Parcel).

*Violence.* Violence can impact self-esteem in a variety of ways. Being a victim and being a bystander of violence can negatively affect self-esteem. According to Massey (1998), children who are not direct physical victims of violence but consistently witness abuse in the home are more likely to exhibit emotional disturbances such as low self-esteem. Neglect, another form of abuse, can also impact children's self-esteem. According to Massey, neglected children have a more difficult time obtaining and maintaining healthy relationships because of the negative emotional impression from not

bonding or forming attachments to anyone at home. Children regularly exposed to violence have more difficulty dealing with stress and have a more difficult time in school. As Massey asserted, children are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem when they do not believe they are succeeding in school. When children have a high self-esteem, they generally work harder to do the best they can and “strive for excellence” (Pawel, 2001, p. 2). As such, it is thought that these children will aspire to be higher achievers in school (Menaghan & Parcel, 1991; Pawel, 2001).

*Race and ethnicity.* Studies have shown differences in level of self-esteem between racial and ethnic groups (Campbell & Twenge, 2002; Pallas, 1989). According to Campbell and Twenge, African Americans seem to rate themselves with the highest level of self-esteem compared to other racial and ethnic groups, even Caucasians. Campbell and Twenge found that Caucasians rated their self-esteem second highest to the African Americans, and higher than other racial and ethnic groups. On the contrary, a study by Frisby (1997) found a correlation between self-esteem and delinquency in Caucasians, a relationship not found with any other ethnic background. Frisby stated that individuals who are proud of and positively identify themselves with their culture display or report higher levels of self-esteem.

Jones and Watson (1990) suggested racial minorities might suffer from low self-esteem due to the discrimination they experience in school. Minorities are more likely to have people prejudge them, therefore causing them to be discriminated against. According to Jones and Watson, if teachers discriminate in the classroom, there is deficient amount of information taught and the information will not be as worthy and rewarding. Victims of discrimination are also less likely to receive additional help (Jones

and Watson). When minority students, or victimized students, observe these negative behaviors and attitudes toward them, they are likely to develop lower levels of self-esteem. These students are going to have a lower self-esteem because of the negative attention, or lack thereof, received. As such, they tend to be less ambitious in the classroom, do more poorly academically, contributing to a declining self-esteem (Jones & Watson, 1990).

*Community.* Socioeconomic status can also affect self-esteem (Twenge & Campbell, 2002). Low socioeconomic status affects the self-esteem in children. The effects are thought to be twofold: parental stress and not getting their needs met (Twenge & Campbell, 2002). Twenge and Campbell found a correlation between low socioeconomic status and low self-esteem; specifically, the older the individual, the higher the correlation between socioeconomic status and self-esteem. Often, low socioeconomic status parents have a difficult time finding jobs; and, when they do, they are not economically rewarding. Parents who are employed and are not earning enough money to support their family are frequently stressed because of this economic disadvantage. Because parents are worn out and under stress, their relationships with their spouses and children can be affected. When financial concerns predominate, there seems to be more spousal disagreements and negative parenting toward the children. This negative parenting, in turn, lowers children's self-esteem (Axinn, Duncan, & Thornton, 1999; Menaghan & Parcel, 1991).

According to Axinn, Duncan, and Thornton (1999), children who come from low socioeconomic status families do not have the same opportunity to obtain desired and needed material goods and services. Many factors can fall into this category of needs and

wants. For example, needs and wants can include anything from new clothing to being able to see a doctor and dentist on a regular schedule. When a child's major needs and wants are not fulfilled, he or she is more likely to feel inferior and have a lower self-esteem (Axinn, Duncan & Thornton, 1999).

*Gender.* Some studies have shown that females report and have lower self-esteem than males (Emler, 2001; Twenge & Campbell, 2002). Frost and McKelvie (2004) studied and surveyed students in elementary school, high school, and college; results at all levels found that males generally rated their self-esteem higher than the females. It was also found that the older students get, the lower they rate their self-esteem. The way in which individuals perceive their successes and failures greatly impact their level of self-esteem or how they report feeling about themselves. Self-esteem, school performance and academic experience all affect each other.

Cohen (2003) reported that when females are successful, they often relate their success to external factors. For instance, if a female performed very well on an exam, she would be more likely to say the exam was easy or the teacher used a lenient grading procedure. According to the research (Cohen, 2003), females take less account for their successes and attribute them to external factors not in their control. In contrast, males are more likely to accredit their successes internal factors. For example, males are more likely to accredit their successes to their intellectual ability.

In terms of failure, males and females generally respond differently (Cohen, 2003). Females frequently use more internal explanations as to why they have failed or performed poorly on an exam. For instance, females are more likely to say they did not try or are not smart enough. When males experience failure, they attributed their failures

to external factors. If a male received a low grade on an exam, they are more likely to blame the teacher or other external stimuli. This explains how self-esteem can affect academic performance and can continue to have a cyclic effect for females. Females who have a low self-esteem will think lower of themselves when they do not master subjects in school. And when they receive the bad grade, they learn to satisfy their perceived notions of why they failed. Since males tend to view their performance differently, it makes it easier to understand how and why they are more likely to report having higher self-esteem (Cohen, 2003; Hess & Copeland, 1997).

#### *Connection between Self-Esteem and At-Risk*

Research indicates self-esteem and factors putting children at-risk are intercorrelated (Frost & McKelvie, 2004; Howse, Lange, Farran & Boyles, 2003; York, 1994). Being at-risk can contribute to lower self-esteem, and having a low self-esteem can affect a student's at-risk status. Many at-risk factors can affect students' view of themselves. The more factors characterizing students at-risk will increase their likelihood of lower self-esteem. For instance, children from low socioeconomic status families generally start school with lower academic skills than their peers from average to high socioeconomic status backgrounds (House, Lange, Farran & Boyles). Coming from a low income family and initially demonstrating lower academic skills puts an individual at-risk for failing in school. In a study done by Howse, Lange, Farran and Boyles, for example, children at-risk received lower scores on vocabulary, mathematics, and reading tests. Howse and colleagues suggested when children do not perform well academically, they feel incompetent and less motivated. According to Howse and colleagues, persistent



feelings of incompetence can have a draining effect on esteem. They, therefore, are more likely to develop lower self-esteem.

Donnelly (1987) reported, “At-risk students who are not experiencing success in school are potential dropouts. They are usually low academic achievers who exhibit low-self-esteem” (p. 1). Donnelly continued to characterize students at-risk in terms of their ethnic backgrounds, male gender, low socioeconomic status or families with little income, and children of parents whom do not have high levels of educational attainment.

Rak and Patterson (1996) identified both biological and environmental factors that may affect self-esteem. In terms of biology, congenital defects and a mother’s poor nutrition when carrying the child can create negative consequences, or risk factors, for the child.

*Environmental factors.* In addition to ethnic background, gender, socioeconomic status, and parents’ education, other environmental factors can increase the likelihood of children being identified as at-risk. Examples of those environmental factors include family size and conflict, violence, abuse, and parents with a mental illness (Rak & Patterson, 1996; Smokowski, 1998; Webb, 1992). These children with environmental disadvantages are at-risk of doing poorly in school, dropping out of school, and possessing a low self-esteem. Environmental factors can hinder the quality of care parents perform. Self-esteem depends on the structure of parenting and the affection parents bestow upon their children. As such, when children do not receive the love, affection, guidance, discipline, correction and regulation of rules from their parents, they are more likely to have lower self-esteem than children receiving quality care (Rak & Patterson, 1996; Singg & Farquhar, 2001). Parents provide stability and security to their

children, and children need these protection factors to feel safe, secure, loved and part of a family. According to Tucker Burgo (2002), these features influence a more positive self-view.

In summary, self-esteem relies on feelings of confidence and competence. Whether or not an individual feels confident or competent, it is often a result of their background, experience and the way they view themselves in environmental situations. Factors within the child, the child's family and the community in which the child is raised all influence his or her experiences. Children who receive negative attention, no attention from parents, or come from a financially unstable family, tend to view life more negatively because they have a difficult time seeing the positive side. Once children start to think negatively, they have a tendency to look for information that matches what they already think about themselves and ignore the positive evidence. According to South Hampton City Council (2004), self-esteem and risk factors affect each other interchangeably and continue to affect each other cyclically.

### Chapter III: Methodology

This chapter includes information about how the sample was selected, a description of the sample, and the instrumentation used. An explanation of the data collection and data analysis procedures are also included.

#### *Subject Selection and Description*

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between self-esteem, socioeconomic status, grade level, and gender. Fourth and fifth grade students from three different elementary schools in north central Wisconsin participated. The three schools were chosen based on the overall percentage of students who received subsidized lunches.

For the purpose of this study, the three schools will be identified as School A, School B, and School C. School A is a kindergarten through eighth grade school, with a total school enrollment of about 280. School B and C have kindergarten through fifth grade students. School B has a total student enrollment of 161, and School C's enrollment is about 202 students. All fourth and fifth grade students (167 total students) from the three schools were invited to participate in the questionnaire. Of the 167 invited, 144 participated. About 36 percent of the participants received subsidized lunches, while 64 percent did not receive subsidized lunches. Refer to Table 1 in Appendix A for more specific demographic information.

#### *Instrumentation*

A modified version of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was used. Students were asked to identify their grade level and gender. Following these items, students were asked to respond to ten statements asking how the students feel about themselves. The students

were also asked to rate each statement using a five-point Likert scale. Some of the questions were re-written to simplify the wording for the younger sample selected for the purposes of this study. Students were asked to respond to each statement identifying if they strongly agreed, agreed, were neutral, disagreed, or strongly disagreed. A sample scale is located in Appendix D.

#### *Data Collection and Distribution*

Prior to the data collection, permission was obtained from the district office and administrators at each of the schools. Permission was also obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. The researcher inserted the Parent Letter and Permission Slip form in the “Wednesday Take Home Folders” of all the students invited from School A. For all students invited to participate in the questionnaire from School B and School C, the researcher mailed the Parent Letter and Permission Slip forms to their home addresses. The Parent Letter and Permission Slip form is included in Appendix C. Parents were asked to read the letter. If the parents did not want their child to participate, they were asked to return the form to their child’s school by a specified date. The form included their child’s name, and parents were instructed to check a box indicating they did not want their child to participate. Additionally, parents were requested to sign all returned forms.

The questionnaire was administered to only those students who did not return the signed Parent Letter and Permission Slip forms. The questionnaires were administered on various days for a period of three weeks during the months of September through October of 2007. The questionnaires were administered during each child’s home room in the

mornings. The questionnaire was administered a different day for each school. School A's questionnaire was administered following their morning recess. School B and School C's questionnaires were administered at the beginning of the school day.

Prior to distributing the questionnaires, a small mark was put on the back of the questionnaires of the students who received subsidized lunch. The secretaries at each school assisted the researcher with the questionnaire lay-out and distribution. Prior to school starting, the researcher and the school secretary went to each classroom and laid out the questionnaires on each student's desks. The secretary placed a marked questionnaire on the desk of those participating students who received subsidized lunch. Then, the unmarked questionnaires were placed on the desks of the remaining students.

After the students entered their classrooms and sat at their desks, the administrator verbally provided a brief description of the purpose and directions for completing the questionnaire. The subjects' were reminded that their participation in this study was completely voluntary, and the individuals were instructed to not include their names on the questionnaire to ensure confidentiality. Additionally, if students were uncomfortable answering a specific question, they were instructed to skip it or they could withdraw from the study without being penalized at any time. Further, the students were allowed to ask for assistance if they had difficulty understanding the questions or how to complete the questionnaire.

### *Data Analysis*

The findings from the questionnaire were analyzed using independent *t* test analyses. The analysis was used to look for any differences in self-esteem according to socioeconomic status, gender and/or grade level for each item and the total score. Some

items were reverse-coded so that lower mean values indicated higher levels of self-esteem. A probability value of less than .05 was adopted to determine significant differences between the mean values.

## Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the self-esteem of fourth and fifth grade students and determine if there were any differences according to gender, grade, and socioeconomic status. This chapter addresses the results in terms of the three research questions that follow.

*Does the self-esteem of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, as measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, differ by gender?*

When comparing males and females, the total score did not suggest a significant difference ( $t(117) = .73, p = .46$ ) between their perceptions of self-esteem according to gender. However, results indicated the females in the study were less likely ( $t(117) = 1.99, p \leq .05$ ) to indicate they sometimes think they are “no good at all” compared to the males in the study (see Table B1 in Appendix B for specific data on all items regarding the effect of gender on self-esteem).

*Does the self-esteem of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, as measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, differ by grade?*

A significant difference between the fourth and fifth grade students on their total score was not found ( $t(117) = 1.23, p = .22$ ). However, a significant difference between the grades was found on one question on the questionnaire. Fifth graders were more likely ( $t(117) = 2.38, p \leq .05$ ) to indicate they “can do things as well as others” compared to the fourth graders (see Table B2 in Appendix B for specific data on all items regarding the effect of grade on self-esteem).

*Does the self-esteem of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, as measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, differ by socioeconomic status?*

The total score comparison did indicate the unsubsidized lunch group had significantly higher ( $t(117) = 2.42, p \leq .5$ ) self-esteem than the subsidized lunch group. In addition, there were four individual questions that generated significant differences between the free and reduced lunch group and the regular lunch group. The unsubsidized lunch group was more likely to indicate: they liked themselves ( $t(117) = .69, p \leq .5$ ), they believed they were as important as others ( $t(117) = 2.28, p \leq .05$ ), they were less likely to feel like failures ( $t(117) = 2.59, p \leq .05$ ), and they were more likely to take a positive attitude about themselves ( $t(117) = 1.98, p \leq .05$ ) compared to the subsidized lunch group (see Table B3 in Appendix B for specific data on all items regarding the effect of socioeconomic status on self-esteem).



## Chapter V: Discussion

This chapter contains a discussion of the study's results and limitations. Recommendations for future research and practice in the area of self-esteem with at-risk students are also addressed.

### *Notable Findings*

In terms of age and gender, the findings in this study did not correspond with past research and literature regarding self-esteem. However, in terms of socioeconomic status, the findings in this study were consistent with previous research and literature. The results from this study indicated that overall levels of self-esteem were not affected by grade or gender for this sample of students. Furthermore, the results of this study found students with lower socioeconomic status (i.e., those who received subsidized lunches) had lower self-esteem compared to those with coming from higher socioeconomic families (i.e., those who participated in the regular lunch program). Specific findings related to these results follow.

The first research objective was to identify if and what differences in self-esteem were found between the males and females in these elementary grades. Based on the previous research, females tend to report lower self-esteem compared to males (Elmer, 2001; Frost & McKelvie, 2004; Twenge & Campbell, 2002). When comparing their total mean scores on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the current study did not find a significant difference between the self-esteem of the males and females. However, on one individual question, females rated one item higher; they were less likely to indicate that they feel "no good at all." This finding appears to be inconsistent with previous research

that indicates males are less likely to rate their self-esteem negatively as compared to females (Elmer, 2001; Frost & McKelvie, 2004; Twenge & Campbell, 2002).

The second objective of this study was to determine if and what differences were identified between the self-esteem of fourth and fifth grade students. Some research suggests students can be identified as at-risk and begin identifying rating their self-esteem low during the elementary years (Donnelly, 1987; Frost & McKelvie, 2004). Other research indicates that some at-risk qualities begin at birth (South Hampton City Council, 2004). Twenge and Campbell (2002) suggested that there is more of a correlation between self-esteem and socioeconomic status as individuals get older. Given this study did not find a significant difference between how the fourth and fifth grade students rated their overall levels of self-esteem, it appears as though developmental differences in levels of self-esteem may not be discernable between similar grade levels. However, more specific results indicated the fifth graders were more likely to rate themselves as having higher self-esteem on one question compared to the fourth graders. Fifth graders were more likely to indicate they can “do things as well as others.” This finding is inconsistent with previous research suggesting that the self-esteem of certain groups of students diminishes as they experience more risk factors.

The last research objective was to identify what differences may exist between the elementary students who received subsidized lunches and those who did not qualify for the subsidized lunch program. Research suggests individuals who have more at-risk factors are more likely to have a lower self-esteem than those identified with few or no at-risk factors (Frost & McKelvie, 2004; Howse, Lange, Farran & Boyles, 2003; York, 1994). Specifically, Howse, Lange, Farran and Boyles (2003) suggested that students

from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to develop lower self-esteem. This study found students who received free and reduced lunches rated themselves as having significantly lower self-esteem than students who did not receive subsidized lunches. Specifically, the unsubsidized lunch group more often indicated they felt they were “as important as others,” less likely to feel like failures, and more likely to “take a positive attitude” about themselves. These findings appear to be consistent with previous research that suggests students from families who struggle economically tend to rate their self-esteem lower than those individuals whose families are not economically disadvantaged.

### *Limitations*

It is important to identify any limitations which may have had an effect on the current study. First of all, it is possible that the participants did not answer truthfully or understand the questions correctly. Also, this study only surveyed a portion of students out of two similar grade levels in one district; therefore, this study may not adequately represent a larger population of elementary students. Another limitation may be that even though some students may have come from low-income families, they might not have applied for the subsidized lunch program. If this was the case, the socioeconomic groups may not have been accurately identified. A further potential limitation may have been the process employed for parental notification and consent. Although the implied consent parental permission form was approved by the district in which the survey was administered and by the University of Wisconsin-Stout’s Instructional Review Board (IRB), a limitation may be that the participant sample may not evenly represent the total population of students because some groups of parents may have been more likely read the consent form and withdraw their consent for participation.

### *Recommendations for Future Research*

Based on the current research findings, recommendations can be made for future research. Further research should be conducted looking at self-esteem and socioeconomic status. Specifically, longitudinal studies or cross-sectional studies involving a wide range of grade levels, such as grades three through twelve, could be conducted, compared, and evaluated to find if there is an effect on self-esteem by socioeconomic status at different grade levels; and if so, when do those effects emerge. These results would assist educators in their attempts to provide services to students who are truly in need of intervention.

The research also suggests further research to be examined on a greater population than the present study. By doing so, the results could be further generalized. In addition, further research is needed in the area of research-based interventions for students who are at-risk for, and suffer from, low self-esteem. Whereas much of the literature has examined variables such as socioeconomic status and gender, educators cannot change these variables. As such, future research efforts should identify proven, scientifically-based intervention strategies for students identified with low self-esteem.

### *Implications for Practice*

One recommendation would be for school psychologists and/or school counselors to use multiple methods to identify students in need of intervention services in addition to self-report ratings. The findings from this research may help school psychologists and/or school counselors implement interventions in the schools to address issues relating to self-esteem. School counselors and/or school psychologists may employ small group or individual counseling sessions to address issues of poor self-esteem. In particular,

cognitive-behavioral therapy, child-centered group play therapy, and solution focused brief therapy have been found to be effective interventions to increase the self-esteem in children and adolescents (Baggerly, 2004; Galbraith & Alexander, 2005; Taylor & Montgomery, 2007). Additionally, classroom based guidance lessons that focus on relationships and positive self-talk may help develop more positive self-esteem. Another recommendation would be for staff to encourage all students to take pride in their accomplishments and foster a positive outlook.

### *Summary*

Fourth and fifth grade students from three different elementary schools in north central Wisconsin were administered a version of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Total score and individual item results were compared between the grade levels, genders, and different levels of socioeconomic status for this population of students. This study did not find a significant difference between grade levels or genders on the total mean scores, but similar to previous research, a significant difference was found between students who received free/reduced lunches and those who were not eligible for the subsidized lunch program.

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## Appendix A: Demographic Information

Table 1

*Sample Characteristics and Participant Population*

Variable	Demographic	<i>n/N</i>	Percentages
Gender	Male	70/80	48.6/48
	Female	74/87	51.4/52.1
Grade	4 <sup>th</sup>	68/84	47.2/50.1
	5 <sup>th</sup>	76/83	52.8/49.7
School	School A	48/53	33.3/31.7
	School B	39/48	27.1/28.7
	School C	57/66	39.6/39.5
Economic Status	Subsidized Lunch	52/53	36.1/37.7
	Unsubsidized Lunch	92/104	63.9/62.3

## Appendix B: Statistical differences in self-esteem

Table B1

*Differences by Gender*

Variable	Male		Female		<i>df</i>	<i>t</i> value
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>		
I like myself	1.71	0.91	1.63	1.02	110.9	0.51
Sometimes I think I am no good at all <sup>a</sup>	2.83	1.30	2.38	1.15	117	2.00*
I feel there are a lot of good things about me	1.86	1.00	1.66	0.90	116.97	1.12
I feel I do not have much to be proud of <sup>a</sup>	2.06	1.26	1.86	1.02	116.03	0.98
I feel useless at times <sup>a</sup>	2.87	1.13	2.80	1.30	109.74	0.31
I feel I am as important as others	2.00	1.11	1.93	1.19	112.95	0.34
I wish I respected myself more <sup>a</sup>	2.97	1.43	3.07	1.59	111.16	-0.37
I feel like I am a failure <sup>a</sup>	1.75	1.03	1.82	1.06	114.44	-0.39
I take a positive attitude about myself	2.14	1.09	2.02	1.70	113.06	0.60
TOTAL SCORE	22.27	5.82	21.41	6.94	107.86	0.73

*Note:* <sup>a</sup>Reverse-coded items. Lower mean values on all items indicate higher levels of perceived self-esteem.

\*  $p \leq .05$

Table B2

*Differences by Grade*

Variable	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade		5 <sup>th</sup> Grade		<i>df</i>	<i>t</i> value
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>		
I like myself	1.75	1.05	1.60	0.87	107.35	0.83
Sometimes I think I am no good at all <sup>a</sup>	2.73	1.31	2.51	1.19	111.72	0.98
I feel there are a lot of good things about me	1.79	1.04	1.75	0.88	108.34	0.23
I can do things as well as others	2.41	1.17	1.94	0.98	107.8	2.38*
I feel I do not have much to be proud of <sup>a</sup>	1.89	1.11	2.03	1.19	116.76	-0.66
I feel useless at times <sup>a</sup>	2.93	1.20	2.76	1.21	115.6	0.75
I feel I am as important as others	1.89	1.09	2.03	1.19	116.9	-0.66
I wish I respected myself more <sup>a</sup>	3.23	1.48	2.83	1.51	115.9	1.48
I feel like I am a failure <sup>a</sup>	1.86	1.05	1.71	1.04	115.01	0.75
I take a positive attitude about myself	2.14	1.24	2.03	1.02	106.44	0.54
TOTAL SCORE	22.63	6.61	21.19	6.10	112.57	1.23

*Note:* <sup>a</sup>Reverse-coded items. Lower mean values on all items indicate higher levels of perceived self-esteem.

\*  $p \leq .05$

Table B3

*Differences by Socioeconomic Status*

Variable	Unsubsidized Lunch		Subsidized Lunch		<i>df</i>	<i>t</i> value
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>		
I like myself	1.62	0.84	1.76	1.14	65.82	-0.69*
Sometimes I think I am no good at all <sup>a</sup>	2.69	1.28	2.48	1.19	89.52	0.88
I feel there are a lot of good things about me	1.66	0.88	1.95	1.06	72.41	-1.60
I can do things as well as others	2.05	1.03	2.36	1.21	73.49	-1.46
I feel I do not have much to be proud of <sup>a</sup>	1.83	1.14	2.21	1.14	84.54	-1.75
I feel useless at times <sup>a</sup>	2.69	1.21	3.12	1.17	86.41	-1.88
I feel I am as important as others	1.78	1.00	2.31	1.32	67.05	-2.28*
I wish I respected myself more <sup>a</sup>	3.00	1.51	3.05	1.50	85.15	-0.17
I feel like I am a failure <sup>a</sup>	1.58	0.86	2.14	1.24	63.15	-2.60*
I take a positive attitude about myself	1.94	1.08	2.36	1.17	79.09	-1.94*
TOTAL SCORE	20.84	6.14	23.74	6.41	81.33	-2.39*

*Note:* <sup>a</sup>Reverse-coded items. Lower mean values on all items indicate higher levels of perceived self-esteem.

\*  $p \leq .05$



## Appendix C: Parent Letter and Permission Slip

Dear Parent(s),

My name is Katie Bork. I am a school psychologist for the Unified School District of Antigo, and I am also pursuing an Educational Specialist degree from the University of Wisconsin-Stout. As one of my graduate degree requirements, I am writing a thesis on the self-esteem of elementary students. I believe self-esteem is essential for the healthy development of students, and a good self-esteem provides a strong foundation for learning. The purpose of this study is to identify how students feel about themselves. With the information gathered, parents, school district staff, and the students themselves may learn more about self-esteem.

Doing this paper/pencil survey will cause little or no risk to your child. The only potential risk is that some students may find some questions to be sensitive. The survey has been designed to protect your child's privacy. Students will NOT put their names on the survey. All students in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade at your child's school are being asked to complete the survey, but their participation is completely voluntary. Students can skip any questions that they do not wish to answer, and they may stop participating in the survey at any time.

I hope that you will allow your child to partake in this quick survey to help the school's staff understand more about self-esteem. If you **DO NOT** want your child to participate in the study, check the box, include your child's name, and return to the form to the school **no later than Tuesday, September 25**; otherwise, by not returning this form, you are giving consent for your child to participate in a self-esteem survey.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact any of the following individuals: Katie Bork (the researcher): 715.623.7611 ext. 2114, or Jacalyn Weissenburger, Ph.D. (research advisor): 715.232.2523. Questions about the rights of research subjects can be addressed to Sue Foxwell, Director, Research Services, #152 Vocational Rehabilitation Bldg., UW-Stout, Menomonie, WI 54751; 715-232-2477 or at foxwells@uwstout.edu.

Thank you,

*Katie Bork*

-----

**Child's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

I have read this form and know what the survey is about.

[ ] I **DO NOT** want my child to participate in this survey.

**Parent's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D: Self-Esteem Survey

**This project has been reviewed by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46**

This Survey is about self-esteem. It has been developed so you can tell us how you feel about yourself. The information you give will be used to better understand how students feel and ways to help students feel better about themselves.

**DO NOT** write your name on this survey. The answers will be kept private. No one will know what you write. Answer the questions based on how you really feel.

Completing the survey is voluntary. Whether or not you answer the questions will not affect your grade. If you are not comfortable answering a question, just leave it blank.

### Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale

Circle the appropriate number for each statement depending on whether you strongly agree, agree, are neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree with it.

1. I am in grade:            4            5

2. I am a:                    boy       girl

	strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
3. I like myself.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Sometimes I think I am no good at all.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I feel there are a lot of good things about me.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I can do things as well as others.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I feel useless at times.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I feel I am as important as others.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I wish I respected myself more.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I feel like I am a failure.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I take a positive attitude about myself.	1	2	3	4	5